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THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON THE LANGUAGE OF YOUNG POLES AS MANIFEST IN RECENT HIP-HOP LYRICS

The article presents the results of research into borrowings from English in a corpus of Polish hip-hop lyrics comprising ten recent albums. Classifications of encountered traces of English influence are supplemented with a quantitative analysis and a discussion of the various roles Anglicisms are hypothesised to play in this context.

Introduction

Hip-hop music is a manifestation of youth culture, addressed to the young generation and, in most cases, also created by young performers. The prominent role it plays in the lives of young people (including Poles) is reflected, for example, in the clothes they wear as well as in the language they speak. Hip-hop language can appear to be hermetic and is often incomprehensible to outsiders (e.g. Moch 2001, Ratajczak 2006). As it is, first of all, a spoken variety of language, it is not easily observable for the linguist. However, hip-hop lyrics are supposed to describe the environment their authors live in and to resemble everyday spontaneous speech, so they should, to a large extent, reflect the language hip-hop performers and fans use when talking among themselves.

The history of hip-hop music in Poland goes back to 1995, the year in which Liroy and Wzgórze Ya-Pa 3 released their first official albums (Miszczak et al. 2005). Since then, Polish hip-hop has developed considerably, and numerous new groups, record companies, magazines etc. have been established. Typical topics raised in hip-hop lyrics include: hip-hop music itself (praising one's own output, criticising other performers), partying (attractive girls, alcohol, drugs), social problems (violence, poverty, unemployment, lack of prospects), love (mostly unrequited). The above list, however, is by no means exhaustive.

It is commonly believed that Polish hip-hop lyrics abound in vulgarisms as well as borrowings from English. As indicated in the title, I would like to devote some attention to the latter phenomenon.

Literature review

The influence of English on Polish, which is so noticeable today, began with a few words of English origin in texts from the 17th and 18th centuries, which referred to British or American geography or life and institutions. The first borrowings belonging to other semantic fields referred to ships and the sea (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2006). It was only in the second half of the 20th century that English became the primary source of new borrowings in the Polish language. Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995 enumerates as many as 45 semantic fields abounding in Anglicisms, and, since then, their usage has probably widened considerably.

The topic of English-Polish language contact and its consequences has often been raised in publications. Some of the most extensive discussions of this topic are undoubtedly the works of Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995, 2006. Other recent books include Chłopicki and Świątek 2000 on English in Polish advertisements as well as Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2000 on the lexical, semantic and grammatical influence of English on the language of young Poles. Numerous papers deal with Anglicisms referring to a given semantic field, e.g. Górnicz 2000 for medical vocabulary, Ociepa 2001 for professional careers, Bartłomiejczyk 2006 for illegal drugs.

Some authors attempted to determine the percentage of English borrowings in the corpora they had compiled. Notably, Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2000 analysed a corpus (of over 70,000 running words) of informal conversations by 42 educated speakers of Polish aged between 19 and 35 years and found 288 instances of borrowings, which accounted for about 0.41% of the running words. The distribution of borrowings throughout the corpus, however, proved irregular and dependent mostly on the topic of the conversation (the percentage of borrowings rising radically when topics such as computers were discussed). The same author also compared this corpus with considerably smaller corpora of press articles, TV advertisements and radio advertisements, which proved to contain many more English borrowings (1.01%, 5.21% and 3.89% respectively). The very high values for advertisements are probably due, to some extent, to the fact that product names of English origin or sounding English were also treated as borrowings in this analysis.

Likewise, Zabawa 2006 collected a corpus (about 60,500 running words) of informal conversations by 39 Poles from Upper Silesia, most of them aged between 21 and 36 and having a university degree. The overall percentage of lexical loans from English to the total number of running words was 0.37%, i.e. similar to the result obtained by Otwinowska-Kasztelanic. Again, those conversations in the corpus related to computers contained a particularly large percentage of borrowings.

In contrast, the language of Polish hip-hop remains a topic which has yet to be widely researched. Chaciński 2003 and 2005 devotes a lot of attention to neologisms appearing in this area, but his works, as interesting and readable as they

are, can hardly be treated as scientific (and are not intended as such, in any case). Therefore, probably the only scientific studies of this topic are articles by Moch 2001, 2002 and by Sawaniewska-Mochowa and Moch 2000.

To my knowledge, Moch 2001 is the only article which deals specifically with English borrowings in the language of Polish hip-hop. The analysed corpus comprises lyrics of about 200 songs from Polish hip-hop albums released in the years 1996-2000 by popular performers such as DJ 600V, Kaliber 44, Molesta, Wzgórze Ya-Pa-3 and ZIP Skład. The author presents a dictionary list of English borrowings classified as belonging to various semantic fields (hip-hop music, hip-hop performers and fans, leisure, drugs) as well as some examples of grammatical structures motivated by the influence of the English language and hybrids derived from borrowings by adding Polish morphological affixes. However, no statistical data on English borrowings encountered in the corpus are provided.

Although a linguistic borrowing, often referred to as a loan, can be defined in various ways (for a detailed discussion, see Otwinowska-Kasztelaniec 2000), for the needs of this article I will employ a relatively broad definition from Haugen, who described it as “the attempted reproduction in one language of patterns previously found in another” (1950: 212). This approach will allow me to account for a number of phenomena resulting from the influence of English which are much more subtle than lexical borrowings.

Research project

Material

In order to gain some insight into the language of hip-hop, I decided, as indicated at the beginning, to analyse lyrics taken from a number of recent hip-hop albums. The choice of material for analysis was anything but straightforward. First of all, a distinction needed to be made between what would be regarded as hip-hop and what would not. For example, I decided not to take into account albums by Sistars (as being too close to R&B) or AbradAb (as heavily influenced by reggae), but included in my analysis *Jeden Osiem L* and *Mezo* (although some refer to their music derogatively as “hiphopolo” and do not consider it to be true hip-hop). It must therefore be noted that my decisions in this respect are to a large degree arbitrary; however, the question raises a lot of controversy, even among hip-hop fans much more conversant with the topic than I, and there is no general agreement on a clear border between what should count as hip-hop and what should not. Secondly, it was my intention to choose albums which would enjoy considerable popularity and which would, at the same time, be representative of the present hip-hop scene in Poland. The latter, again, is obviously a question which surpasses the competences of a linguist. A comparison of current bestseller lists in various Internet shops, however, gave me a good idea on albums that were the most popular at the moment of my working on this project (summer 2006).

I further decided to treat as “recent” albums those which were released not earlier than 2003. The list of ten albums consequently selected for analysis is shown in the table below.

Performer	Title of the album	Year
Grammatik	3	2005
Jeden Osiem L	Wideoeteka	2003
Liber	Bógmacher	2004
Mezo	Mezokracja	2003
Mor W.A.	Dla słuchaczy	2004
Pezet/Noon	Muzyka klasyczna	2006
Trzeci Wymiar	Cztery pory rapu	2003
Verba	Ósmy marca	2006
Włodi	Jak nowo narodzony	2003
WWO	Witam was w rzeczywistości	2005

Transcripts of lyrics were obtained from websites devoted to the topic (such as www.eteksty.pl, www.teksty.ixion.pl, www.pipol.pl) and, in case of doubts, checked against recordings and/or transcript versions from a different website. Each chorus was taken into consideration only once. Intros, outros and skits (short, mostly jocular recordings of conversations or song fragments sometimes separating songs proper) were excluded from analysis. The whole corpus comprised 141 songs and approximately 52,500 running words.

Classifications of encountered English borrowings

As explained by Zabawa 2004 and others, borrowings definitely do not constitute a homogeneous group and can be divided into several subclasses according to a number of classifications. Furthermore, some traces of the influence exerted by English are so subtle that many linguists would not define them as borrowings at all.

Firstly, borrowings can be classified according to the degree of their assimilation in the Polish language. In this case, it is rather difficult to draw a clear line between unassimilated, partly assimilated and fully assimilated loans (the classification proposed by Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995). Certain indications are given by characteristics such as spelling and declination (although these often tend to vary and, for instance, different spellings of the same word can be found in texts from the same period). Also, the reach of a particular word among native speakers of the recipient language can be treated as an important argument. However, it must be remembered that assimilation of a foreign word is a gradual process (whose duration can also vary considerably for different words) and, therefore, this clas-

sification should be treated as a continuum rather than a number of clear-cut categories.

Bearing all the above considerations in mind, I would nevertheless like to propose the following classification applicable to the analysed material:

- (1) highly assimilated borrowings with widespread use, understood by a great majority of Poles, recorded in popular dictionaries of the Polish language.

Examples: *falstart*, *OK/okej*, *weekend*, *non stop*, *biznes*, *outsider*, *serwer*, *stres*, *stringi*.

- (2) colloquial expressions generally used and understood by young Poles, at least partly assimilated.

Examples: *sorry/sory*, *joint/dżoint*, *chillout*.

- (3) expressions restricted to hip-hop culture, whose meaning is clear among insiders, but not understandable for outsiders.

Examples: *bauns* ("style of rhythmical dancing to hip-hop music"), *dissy* ("insults directed at other hip-hop performers"), *MC* ("hip-hop performer").

- (4) incidental quotes, i.e. English words and expressions which are not used commonly, detected in an individual song by an individual performer.

Examples: *most important*, *quest*, *money*, *rekurencje* (from *recurrence*).

- (5) longer fragments of English text inserted into a Polish song.

Example: *Just drop it, just drop it, just drop it or play! Choose better, choose better, choose better way to better days!* (Liber, chorus from "Jedna z dróg").

Secondly, borrowings can also be classified depending on the aspect of the English word or expression which exerted some influence on its Polish counterpart. Importation is not limited to the combination of form and meaning (although such borrowings are the most conspicuous), but also meaning as such, morphological structure, word order or even a method of word building. Traces of English detected in the corpus can therefore be divided into the following categories:

- (1) lexical borrowings in which both form and meaning come from English.

Examples: *blant*, *diss*, *vip*, *babe*.

- (2) hybrids, i.e. derivatives of lexical borrowings to which a native Polish affix has been added.

Examples: *baunsować* (verb derived from *bauns*), *blancina* (diminutive from *blant*, meaning "weak marijuana cigarette").

- (3) calques (loan translations), i.e. word-by-word or morpheme-by-morpheme translations of English expressions and words.

Examples: *na mikrofonie* (from *on the mike*), *wolny styl* (from *freestyle*), *sprawdź to* (from *check it out*), *politycznie niepoprawne* (from *politically incorrect*), *mydlana opera* (from *soap opera*), *anielski pył* (from *angel dust*, slang expression meaning "illicit drug in powder form"), *martwi prezydenci* (from *dead presidents*, slang expression meaning "money").

- (4) semantic borrowings (loanshifts), in which a native Polish word gains a new meaning under the influence of its English counterpart.

Examples: *koks* (“cocaine”, analogical to *coke*), *dym* (“marihuana”, analogical to *smoke*), *ekipa* (“a hip-hop group”, analogical to *crew*), *gówno* (“hard drug”, analogical to *shit*), *szacunek* (used as a greeting, analogical to *respect*).

- (5) transferred grammatical structures, i.e. such structures which are not typical for the Polish language, but are typical for English.

Examples: noun + noun structures such as *stres test*, *luz boy*, *rap projekt*, *spontan akeja*, *gigant kac*, *folklor dancing* (where one or both the nouns themselves are sometimes lexical borrowings); noun in genitive modifying the noun which follows, as in *skóry kolor*, *wzrostu hormon*, *policji kordon* used instead of the more usual *kolor skóry*, *hormon wzrostu* and *kordon policji* and probably modelled on the English expressions *skin colour*, *growth hormone* and *police cordon*.

- (6) neologisms created in accordance with English word building trends, notably shortenings.

Examples: abbreviations such as *WWA* (from *Warszawa*), *WLKP* (from *Wielkopolska*) referring to cities or regions, similar to English *EC* (from *East Coast*), *LA* (from *Los Angeles*), *NYC* (from *New York City*); clippings such as *mik* (from *mikrofon*), *komp* (from *komputer*), *spontan* (from *spontaniczny*), *feta* (from *amfetamina*), *alko* (from *alkohol*), similar to English *mike*, *caddy* (from *Cadillac*), *bro* (from *brother*).

Last but not least, English borrowings can also be divided according to their semantic content, i.e. the topic to which they refer (as proposed by Moch 2001 and others). Apart from a large number of lexemes which are fairly general and do not fall into any noticeable categories, the borrowings detected in the corpus can be classified as follows:

- (1) referring to hip-hop music. As hip-hop is very often self-referential (probably to a much greater degree than any other genre), this is definitely the largest group, which may be further divided into subgroups of words describing music as such (styles, techniques, songs), people (hip-hop performers and fans), technical vocabulary, etc. This type of vocabulary may be referred to as “professionalisms” (cf. Moch 2001).

Examples: *bity*, *sample*, *intro*, *skit*, *suport*, *MC*, *soundblaster*, *majk*.

- (2) referring to illicit drugs (especially soft drugs, whose use is largely sanctioned by hip-hop culture).

Examples: *blanty*, *spid*, *skun*, *splify*.

- (3) referring to modern technology (computers, mobile phones etc.).

Examples: *forwardować*, *play stacja*, *prepaid*, *login*, *sms*, *mail*, *billing*.

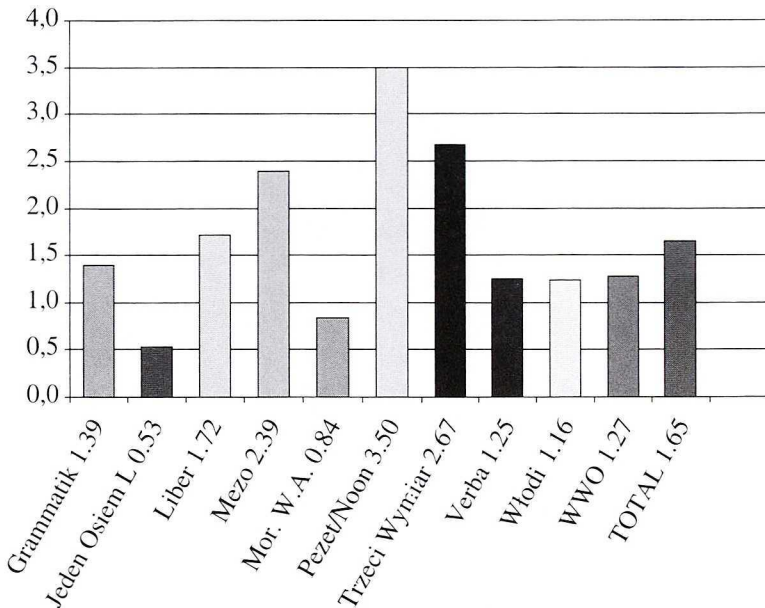
- (4) exclamations, phatic expressions.

Examples: *yo*, *jol*, *sorry*, *lal*, *peace*, *ups*.

Quantitative analysis

As mentioned in the literature review section, there have been some research projects designed to determine the percentage of English borrowings (lexical

ones at various stages of assimilation) in a corpus of spoken Polish (Otwinowska-Kasztelanica 2000, Zabawa 2006). I conducted a similar analysis in order to be able to compare the results for hip-hop lyrics with those obtained by the above-mentioned authors for general Polish. Proper names were not counted as English borrowings, neither were internationalisms whose direct source was difficult to determine (such as *korupcja*, *globalny*, *ewidentny*). Words originating from other languages which came to Polish through its contact with English were, on the other hand, treated as English borrowings (e.g. *zombie*, *studio*), and so were (relatively rare) hybrids derived from English lexical loans. If in doubt, the etymology of words was checked in the newest edition (published in 2005) of *Wielki słownik wyrazów obcych PWN* (later referred to as *WSWO*). The percentages of such lexical borrowings from English to the total number of running words, calculated for each performer individually and for all of them together, are shown in the chart below.

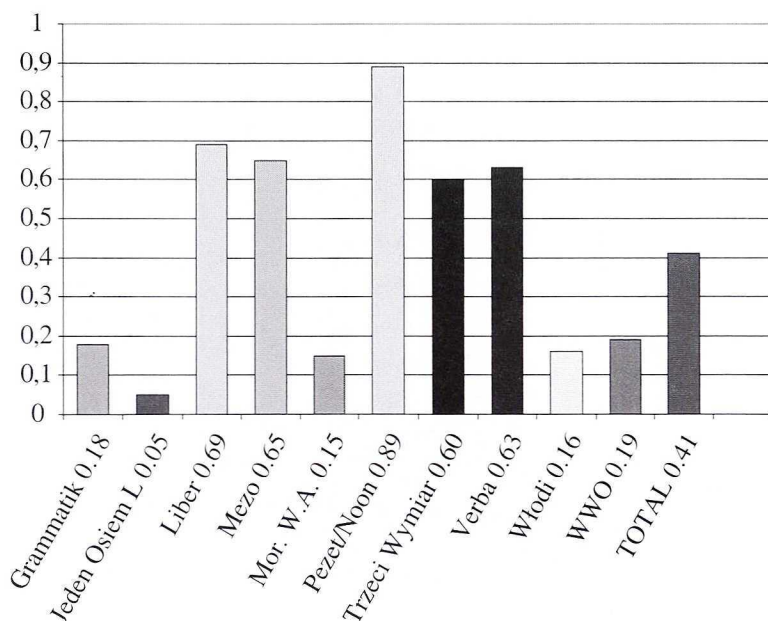


As can be seen, the percentage of English borrowings in the corpus of hip-hop lyrics proved to be much higher than in the existing corpora of general spoken Polish (1.65% as compared to 0.41% in the corpus analysed by Otwinowska-Kasztelanica 2000 and 0.37% in the corpus analysed by Zabawa 2006). The percentages differ considerably across performers, but even the most “purist” group, Jeden Osiem L, reaches a value which is higher than the mean values obtained by the abovementioned authors.

Moreover, in order to be able to assess to what extent hip-hop music may be responsible for introducing new words of English origin into Polish, I conducted

a quantitative analysis of the frequency of unassimilated borrowings in the same corpus. As already mentioned, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between unassimilated and partly assimilated borrowings. However, as it was necessary to choose some criterion as decisive, for the needs of this analysis I assumed that words and expressions not found in *WSWO* would be treated as unassimilated. This means that words such as *rap*, *hip-hop*, *joint*, *skrecz*, *suport* were considered to be assimilated (at least partly), as all of them already appear in the abovementioned dictionary.

All the words of English origin detected in the corpus which appeared to be relatively new were checked against *WSWO* and the ones not present there were marked as unassimilated. Separately for each performer, the proportion was then calculated of the number of unassimilated English items to the total number of words. Finally, the mean value for all the performers was calculated. The results obtained are shown in the chart below:



Interestingly, although the total mean value lies at 0.41%, none of the individual values comes close to it. Instead, the performers can be divided into two equal groups, one group using few unassimilated items, with values below 0.2% (with *Jedem Osiem L* achieving a low of 0.05%), and the other group with values of at least 0.6% (with *Pezet* and *Noon* reaching 0.89%). This strongly suggests that the attitude towards English borrowings varies considerably across performers and, consequently, hip-hop culture should not be collectively blamed for the abundance of items of English origin in the language of young Poles. As no similar studies are available for comparison, however, it is impossible to state whether

the obtained values relating to unassimilated borrowings are relatively high or low. It would be interesting, for example, to conduct a similar analysis on a corpus of contemporary rock or pop lyrics.

Functions of English borrowings

Finally, I would like to devote some attention to the roles that the borrowings detected in the corpus presumably play. The most obvious function of borrowings is to name new objects and phenomena, frequently transferred from the source language culture, for which no names exist in the recipient language. This is also the type of borrowings which are rarely objected to by linguists and classified as “necessary” (see e.g. Zabawa 2004). Most items which were earlier classified semantically as referring to hip-hop music can be counted among this group, e.g. *rap*, *hip-hop*, *MC*, *skrecz*.

Many English borrowings found in the corpus, however, seem to perform other roles, generally associated with slang (Crystal 1988), i.e. preventing outsiders from getting to know secrets shared by the group and self-identification of speakers as group members. The former function is typically performed by vocabulary referring to drugs (e.g. *skun*, *blanty*) and the latter by phatic expressions (e.g. *yo*, *szacunek*).

Some borrowings may serve as linguistic economy, which plays an important role in the case of lyrics (considering the necessity of preserving the rhythm). This function is performed by various types of shortenings (e.g. *WWA*, *feta*) and probably also by noun + noun structures of the type *rap-artysta* (which would have to be expressed with a longer phrase if using a structure more typical for Polish, e.g. *artysta rapowy*).

Due to the high prestige English enjoys in Poland, many of the detected items (or even a great majority?) may perform the additional function of making the speaker sound fashionable and attractive by identifying him or her with the source language culture (cf. Arabski 2006). This particular function should probably be ascribed as the primary one to professionalisms having their Polish counterparts (such as *majk* – *mikrofon* or *wolny styl* – *improvizacja*), which may be used interchangeably (as *mikrofon*) or not used at all in the context of hip-hop (as *improvizacja*).

In opposition to the abovementioned function, items of English origin are sometimes also used ironically to ridicule the excessive use of English among young Poles desiring to sound fashionable, educated etc. I will illustrate this phenomenon with two song fragments:

- [1] Magistry, studenci, absolwenci
 Most important jest tytuł, a mnie jakoś to nie kręci.
 (Jeden Osiem L, „Powodzenia”)

[2] Druga opcja – podryw na hiphopowca.

Nieprawdopodobny upał, idzie jakaś ryba, niezła dzida,
 wędka, spławik – stajesz vis a vis niej i zaczynasz prawić.
 Mówisz: „Hi, hi, mam hajs, hajs, daj się poderwać – aaj!
 Znam wielu rap-artystów, znasz ich z teledysków,
 mam więcej fejmu niż Dre, więcej dejmów niż fiskus.”
 Nie męcz ją undergroundem, powiedz: „Blazing, yo baby,
 jestem amazing, crazy, gorący jak Jay-Z.”
 (Mezo, „Aniele”)

In the above examples, Anglicisms are put in the mouths of individuals other than the authors, and, obviously, individuals with whom the authors do not sympathise. The first fragment criticises the role of formal education in life, which is supposedly too large. Education is defined by such items as a university degree, or by knowing English (and showing off this knowledge). The second fragment presents a jocular version of a hip-hop fan trying to impress a girl with his wealth, his contacts with hip-hop performers, and also with his English. This self-presentation is full of Anglicisms of various types, which undoubtedly achieves the intended comic effect.

Similarly, hip-hop performers sometimes explicitly protest against excessive use of English borrowings in the language of their peers. Anglicisms are used metalinguistically in such cases, as examples of expressions which should be avoided. Some very interesting lyric fragments of this type are provided by Moch 2001; in my corpus, the following example was found:

[3] W szkołach fristajlu młodzież będzie rozwijać swoje pasje,
 uczyć się poprawnie kłąć i robić groźne miny,
 nie „yo, motherfuckers” lecz rodzime „elo, skurwysyny”!
 (Mezo, „Wodzu prowadź”)

The song from which this excerpt originates describes (in a jocular manner) an ideal hip-hop state, Zjednoczona Republika Hiphopowa (the United Hip-Hop Republic), in whose school system young people should be taught how to swear “correctly”, i.e. using native Polish vulgarisms rather than borrowed ones.

Conclusions

Naturally, most English borrowings appearing in Polish hip-hop lyrics are words describing new objects and phenomena related to hip-hop culture. Therefore, their use is understandable and seems justified. This symptom of language contact is relatively superficial and generally does not raise serious objections. Arabski 2006, for example, states that “lexis in general floats from language to language without too many obstacles”, whereas “other structures like pragmatics,

syntax, morphology and phonology are (in this order) more resistant to foreign influence” (2006: 19). In the light of this, some influences of English detected in the analysed corpus may be regarded as much deeper and, therefore, potentially harmful for the Polish language.

Hip-hop language shows some traces of English influence in all of the above-mentioned layers except for phonology. As for pragmatics, it may be claimed that new phatic expressions such as *yo*, *peace* or *szacunek* reflect the influence of English at this level. As for syntax, there are, among others, noun + noun structures, which are generally criticised by Polish linguists (e.g. Miodek 1999). In terms of morphology, English word building trends seem to influence the creation of some Polish neologisms such as clippings. On the other hand, some hip-hop performers obviously show a high degree of language awareness and explicitly protest against English borrowings in Polish hip-hop or ridicule their excessive use (as illustrated with the quotations presented in the previous section).

It should also be noted that the frequency of borrowings seems to depend, to a large extent, on the topic of the song. Typically, self-referential hip-hop is characterised by great abundance of Anglicisms (mostly professionalisms), whereas songs describing the emotional states of their authors (friendship, love, loneliness etc.) or the problems of contemporary Poland (social deprivation, unemployment, violence in the family etc.) contain much fewer borrowings and are probably comparable in this aspect to general spoken Polish of the young generation.

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